

SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE (CA)  
20 October 1986

# Daniloff and the CIA — Ex-Correspondent's View

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Special to The Chronicle

There is one aspect of the Nicholas Daniloff case that lingers — the suspicion that he indeed had CIA connections.

The answer is that, as do most American foreign correspondents, Daniloff probably did have a brushing acquaintance with the CIA in Moscow. During my 20 years as a foreign correspondent for the Los Angeles Times, I also had a casual relationship with "spooks" in areas where I was based. Particularly in regions of stress and conflict, it is near normal for journalists to be on friendly terms with all U.S. Embassy officials.

Although it had to be self-monitored very carefully, there was often a degree of cooperation between the journalist and, say, the ambassador, other diplomats, the military attache and, yes, the CIA station chief, or the chief's underlings. The cooperation depended upon the degree of mutual trust and good judgment, which developed over time.

So when my friends ask, as they have since the Daniloff spy charges by the Russians arose, did I ever help the CIA, my answer is: "Yes, on occasion, and on occasion the CIA people provided me with information which was helpful. But never was I propositioned to work under contract and undercover, and I would not have accepted such an arrangement if it had been proposed."

Here is an example of how this above-board give-and-take worked with me: When based in Bangkok during the late stages of the Vietnam War, I had occasion to go with Thai troops fighting a guerrilla force up north in their country. The CIA station chief, at my request, filled me in on the guerrillas: suspected strength, weapons, tactics, leadership. As I was leaving, he asked me to "drop by" upon my return if I saw anything "interesting."

I did so. I caused the CIA chief to chuckle when I related how impressed the Thai general was with my knowledge of the guerrillas, but I fear I disappointed him when I confessed that the Thais had shown me very little. The sum and substance of my report-back was that the Thai army was not very aggressive. I was not holding out on the CIA station chief: My story to the Los Angeles Times was about the same, adding only "color" about rural Thai life.

I hope this clarifies the journalist-CIA relationship for domestic critics and suspicious foreigners. But I doubt that it will convince the KGB in Moscow of Daniloff's innocence.

It is all part of the job, this trading of information, part of the job both for diplomats and for correspondents. It is not, in my judgment, a sinister connection. The diplomats have their sources usually in official circles. Journalists develop contacts with unofficial sources, usually not as reliable. So we try to cross-check and authenticate what we have learned. Sometimes we can even be helpful to our country as a conduit between governments; a journalist performed admirably in that role between the Russians and President John Kennedy during the Cuban missile crisis.

During the mid-1970s, when I was based in Cairo, I was one of few American correspondents able to see Moammar Khadafy in Libya. He was already a troublesome anti-American Arab leader, and diplomatic relations had been broken. So after my interviews with Khadafy, if I flew on to Tunis, I related to American diplomats there what the flamboyant Libyan had said. On one occasion, he had said he was ready to kiss and make up if only the Americans would give him the C-130 transport planes he had been promised. Obviously, he wanted that passed on.

I presume a bit of my debriefings in Tunis were included in American diplomatic cables to the State Department that reached Washington before my interview was printed in my newspaper. Serving two masters? My editors didn't think so.

The identity of the station chief — the chief CIA operator in a country who usually has some sort of diplomatic cover, such as "second secretary" — is not always made known to reporters. But in Saigon, the station chief was not only widely known but often held briefings for a select group of "trusted" reporters. His information was for "background use only."

The danger of being too close to CIA "spooks" in Vietnam was that they generally stressed the "company" line, which was that the United States was winning the war. For more reliable information, I found it better to deal with low-level U.S. Agency for International Development workers in the field.

An aspect of the Daniloff behavior with which I have personal reservation is this: As a veteran Moscow correspondent, he should have been alert to the increased danger of entrapment because of the American arrest of a Soviet spy at the United Nations a few weeks before. The KGB needed trade bait. An unopened farewell gift to Daniloff, who was ending his Moscow assignment for U.S. World and News Report, should have been politely declined, even from a Russian friend. Russian friends of foreigners are always on the KGB subvert list.